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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KSUM](#) [AR](#) [BL](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: JANUARY 8-9 VISIT BY WHA A/S SHANNON REAFFIRMS  
U.S.-SPANISH PARTNERSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA

REF: A. MOSCOW 20

[1](#)B. MADRID 1366

[1](#)C. 08 MADRID 518

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Arnold A. Chacon, for reasons 1.  
4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A/S Shannon's January 8-9 Madrid program and subsequent media play were characterized by bilateral goodwill and Spanish optimism for a new phase in U.S.-Spanish cooperation in Latin America despite significant challenges in the region. He highlighted U.S. engagement in the Americas, shared interests with Spain, and our outreach in Europe and Asia to countries with strategic interests in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Spanish also raised Gaza and the High-Level Meeting on Food Security taking place in Madrid later this month. END SUMMARY.

U.S., Spain, and Europe in Latin America  
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[1](#)2. (C) Spanish Secretary of State for Iberoamerica Trinidad Jimenez hosted a lunch for A/S Shannon January 8. The conversational tour of the region set the stage for the remainder of A/S Shannon's interactions, notably the breakfast colloquium January 9 at Casa de America and a 90-minute meeting with Secretary General of the Presidency Bernardino Leon, also January 9. At lunch and again before a public audience, Jimenez asserted that no two countries were more important to the future success of Latin America than the U.S. and Spain. She reviewed recent Spanish involvement in the region (Note: In what the press has called an effort to promote a closer relationship between Europe and Latin America, Jimenez traveled to Lisbon on January 13 and met with Portuguese FM Amado and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. She also received her Italian counterpart in Madrid on January 14. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) During his meeting with A/S Shannon, Leon suggested the Western Hemisphere was becoming more "global." Leon cited the expulsion of Israel's ambassador by Venezuelan President Chavez and Nicaragua's September 2008 recognition of the breakaway Georgian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Leon also expressed interest in the approach the new U.S. Administration would take to the region and offered GOS assistance during the transition. Leon said

President-elect Obama had expressed his desire to consult with Spanish President Zapatero before making any big decisions on Latin America policy. (Note: In a January 13 radio interview Zapatero said he "hoped to have a deep conversation (with Obama) as soon as possible about conflict areas, as well as about Latin America, including Cuba," but that the contacts would start after January 20. End note.)

14. (C) A/S Shannon told Leon that during the Secretary's December 2008 trip to Panama for the first Pathways to Prosperity plenary, the U.S. had made efforts to engage with all countries in the region that had expressed interest in free trade. Leon raised the EU accords with Central America and Colombia. He lamented that Bolivia would likely be excluded due to the negative influence of Venezuela. Ecuador, he surmised, would want in on any trade agreement in order to protect banana exports.

#### MEXICO AND BRAZIL

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15. (C) Jimenez praised the U.S. for focusing attention on Mexico's border with Guatemala. Hearing that President-elect Obama would meet with Mexican President Calderon January 12, she called it a good initiative to form new institutional relationships. She expressed concern about Calderon's capacity to fight corruption within his government but noted

the widespread respect he commanded in the region.

16. (C) Leon and Jimenez were very upbeat about Brazil. Regarding Lula's efforts on behalf of regional integration,

Jimenez assured Shannon, "if it is good for Latin America, it is good for Spain." She suggested Spain and the U.S. should see each other and also Brazil and Mexico as partners rather than rivals. Discarding the idea that the U.S. had been excluded from December meetings in Saupe, Shannon praised Lula's leadership and quoted the Secretary as calling Brazil "a regional power and a global partner." Jimenez was also supportive of "a strong Brazil and an involved Mexico."

#### CENTRAL AMERICA

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17. (C) On Guatemala, both Jimenez and Leon expressed disappointment with Colom's slowness in recognizing and confronting the problems of corruption and organized crime. Jimenez told A/S Shannon she would travel to Guatemala soon to address concerns over insecurity and drug violence. She said Spain would also add an Interior Ministry representative to its embassy in Guatemala to support the Spanish Civil Guard's work in training Guatemalan national police. Leon noted the Guatemalan President had invited two Spanish advisors from the Office of the Presidency and suggested they should make contact with the U.S. Embassy there to exchange views. Leon was generally optimistic about Costa Rica, and opined that El Salvador would be okay following March 15 presidential elections, but noted it would be better if ARENA won. Leon described Nicaraguan President Ortega as a "lost cause." He said Zapatero had refused to meet with Ortega during the October 2008 Latin American Summit in El Salvador. Jimenez called Ortega the worst of all the leaders with whom she works.

#### SOUTHERN CONE

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18. (C) Leon told Shannon the GOS supports the Marsans Group in its dispute with Aerolineas Argentinas but said Spain would take measures to improve the climate before the February 8 visit to Madrid of Argentine President Fernandez de Kirchner. Shannon said the U.S. had made enormous efforts to maintain a good relationship with Argentina, with mixed results. Leon agreed the Kirchner team was "lamentable," and doubted Argentina's "perverse system" could be fixed, yet he expressed hope that Argentines would one day reclaim their political space. He offered to deliver any messages the U.S.

might wish during Fernandez Kirchner's February visit. Leon said Spain was not worried about the outcome of Chilean elections, but expressed disappointment in Paraguayan President Lugo.

#### ANDES

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¶9. (C) Leon noted Ecuador's need to be more competitive to make up for the loss of its oil income. Saying he was hopeful about Ecuadorian President Correa, he conceded his first impression, at the time of Ecuador's expropriation of foreign oil companies, had been decidedly negative. He observed Correa continued to manipulate debt and market access issues for his own political gain, and he opined the Ecuadorian President needed a positive "mentor" in the region.

¶10. (C) Referring to Ecuador's March 2008 border conflict with Colombia and Correa's subsequent European tour, Leon expressed lingering frustration with Correa's propensity to express "barbarities" after a carefully managed and very moderate joint statement with President Zapatero. In the context of balancing Colombian concerns, Leon mentioned Ecuador's request for assistance with air traffic control radar. Leon and A/S Shannon agreed that improved civil aviation control was essential to ensure regional stability in the Andean corridor. Jimenez deemed Venezuelan President Chavez to be weakened, as evidenced by moving up the Venezuelan referendum.

#### CUBA

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¶11. (C) In his conversations with both Jimenez and Leon, A/S Shannon noted Cuba's long resistance to democratic change, and said the U.S., Spain, and other countries must continue to promote such change, pressing consistently for freedom for political prisoners and political space for a democratic opposition. Jimenez mentioned the difficulties of negotiating with the GOC, as in the case of humanitarian aid offers in the wake of hurricanes Ike and Gustav, but insisted it was important to make such gestures even if Cuba ultimately refused them. Anticipating the third round of EU-Cuba human rights talks January 15-16, Jimenez said the Czechs (holding the EU Presidency) did not appear interested in sending messages. Spain, on the other hand, wanted to find the "right formula," presumably not a public one, to speak of pluralism and to visit dissidents. Jimenez said she might travel to Cuba in May 2009 and joked that, looking to the June review of the EU's common position on Cuba, the U.S. ought to give the Czechs instructions that would be helpful to Spain's efforts. Jimenez expounded on what she called the discrepancies between Miami and Washington approaches to Cuba and argued that the U.S. transition was "the best excuse" for a change in U.S. policy.

¶12. (C) Leon asked A/S Shannon to convey Spain's intention to work closely with the U.S. on any possible Spanish presidential visit to Cuba. He did not discard the possibility Zapatero could travel to Cuba in 2009, but he noted Zapatero had backtracked following conflicting public statements by GOS officials. Jimenez retreated further, saying perhaps Zapatero would not visit in 2009 but that a visit would be reasonable during this legislature (which ends in 2012) if it could help promote change in Cuba.

#### AREAS FOR COOPERATION

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¶13. (SBU) Leon asked about the prospects for extending the Merida Initiative to Central America. A/S Shannon said that \$60 million in funding from the first tranche of \$465 million was slated for Central America. An additional \$150 million was requested for Central America in the FY-2009 budget request. Director General of Cooperation with Iberoamerica Consuelo Femenia joined Jimenez' lunch for A/S Shannon and

briefed on Spain's assistance programs in the hemisphere. Femenia spoke of Spanish emphasis on governability, gender issues, and the health sector and noted the importance of continuity of development aid in countries like Bolivia, where Spain's bilateral plans are in limbo. While Jimenez said Spain had not restricted cooperation to Bolivia, the GOS was conscious of the need to make assistance more "efficient." To that end, lunch attendees espoused the benefits of triangular cooperation. A/S Shannon called for increased coherence among assistance programs. He suggested the U.S. and Spain review opportunities for triangular cooperation.

#### GAZA AND FOOD SECURITY

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¶14. (C) Gaza crept into discussions of Latin America. Leon described FM Moratinos's planned trip the week of January 12 to Egypt, Israel, Syria, and the West Bank. A/S Shannon encouraged Leon to stay in touch with U.S. officials on the Middle East to maintain an exchange of views (Note: Moratinos reached out the Secretary by telephone January 15 to describe his trip. End note). Leon also pulled A/S Shannon aside to stress the importance to the GOS attaches to the UN High-Level Meeting on Food Security in Madrid January 26-27.

#### CASA DE AMERICA

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¶15. (U) A/S Shannon and Jimenez drew a standing-room only crowd for an on the record breakfast colloquium January 9 at

Casa de America (the Spanish Government's influential cultural institute for Latin America). A/S Shannon spoke of seeking new partners and opening new space for democracy and economic opportunity in Latin America. He noted the U.S. and Spain shared a strategic vision in the region. He acknowledged that Spain and the U.S. might differ on tactics in some cases but emphasized shared goals. He stressed the need to work not just with Latin American countries but with all countries who have strategic interests in the region. Asked whether 2009 would be the year of Cuba, Jimenez expressed hope for a change of U.S. attitude but commented the future of the embargo depended on gestures from both sides. A/S Shannon in turn insisted on the importance of the international community actively promoting democratic change. He emphasized it was more than just meeting dissidents during visits to the island, important though that was. Countries needed to work collaboratively and consistently with the dissidents to help them create space for a democratic opposition.

#### MEDIA HOMERUNS

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¶16. (U) A/S Shannon granted interviews to the three leading media outlets. Left-of-center daily El Pais (circulation 2.2 million), published a full page interview January 11. A/S Shannon participated in the live broadcast Cadena Ser Radio program "La Ventana" (average listenership 750,000). Number-one ranked Television Espanola (TVE) recorded an interview with A/S Shannon for its regular program "Barrio Latino." The show will air January 20 and will reach audiences throughout Spain and Latin America on January 20. In each interview, A/S Shannon laid out U.S. policy in Latin America and strongly defended the USG's engagement with the region in recent years. Topics of particular interest to the media included U.S. policy towards Cuba and Venezuela, prospects for trade and investment in the region given the economic crisis, drug trafficking and the Merida Initiative, and the perceived rise of leftist/populist leaders in several Latin American countries. Leading journalists and directors of Spanish news wire service EFE also participated in the colloquium January 9.

#### COMMENT

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¶17. (C) Spanish views continue to resonate with our own on most things Latin American. The GOS expresses frustration with the same leaders and situations that are of greatest concern to us. On Cuba, where we have our greatest tactical differences, Spain is watching closely for signals from the new U.S. Administration and hopes to consult closely on the issue. Throughout the Western Hemisphere, Spain seems genuinely interested in working with the U.S., and the Merida Initiative may present a unique opportunity to do so if we can move beyond Spanish good intentions to concrete actions. The Spanish are increasingly aware that many of Latin America's ills, such as narcotics trafficking, impact them as much or more than the U.S. A/S Shannon's visit was an extremely well-timed and typically effective push in the right direction. For historical and cultural reasons, Spain likes to regard Latin America as something of a special preserve and itself as the opinion leader within Europe. Nevertheless, Spanish officials such as Leon and Jimenez are keenly aware of the preponderant U.S. influence in the region and are anxious to maintain the fluid dialogue that has been established in recent years. The Zapatero Administration is likely to maintain its preference for low key diplomacy in dealing with problem countries in Latin America, but that is not say we cannot have a mutually-beneficial partnership in the region.

¶18. (U) A/S Shannon cleared this cable.  
AGUIRRE